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GARDEN WORK

ELSA MILLER
Francis W. Parker School

The garden of the Francis W. Parker School occupies a plot of ground one hundred and twenty-seven by fifty feet, some fifty feet east of the building. The area is well adapted for the purpose, being open on all sides and shaded only at the southeast corner by some tall cottonwood trees.

Fortunately for the drainage of the plot, the subsoil consists of coarse sand and gravel, which was placed there when the excavation for the school building was made. Upon this foundation a heavy layer of properly fertilized loam was placed. Each succeeding year the garden has been plowed and fertilized. This has been the cause of one difficulty. The plowing excluded from our available plants all perennials. Each year the garden was planned anew without "an old year's brand to light the new." That deprived the gardeners of many experiences which are absolutely necessary in the growth of those who are to "love the green things growing."

According to the plan followed for the first three years, every grade planted a bed of some grain or vegetable for the common use of the school. A second bed was assigned to each grade, to be divided into individual plots. It is evident that under this plan the garden presented a motly appearance, since every child planted in his bed whatever he chose, irrespective of what was in his neighbor's bed. Sometimes several kinds of vegetables and flowers were planted in a bed two by three feet. Tall plants shaded and interfered with the growth of low ones; vines overran and crowded out other crops. The effect of the whole was not beautiful. The crop was limited in quantity and poor in quality. The care of the garden grew into a burden rather than a pleasant task. What is more important, the great opportunities which garden work offers toward unifying the school and enriching the social life were not realized.

After three years of such experience the children were ready to combine and organize their efforts, and last year, with the help of the teachers, a new plan was made, the teachers keeping in mind that the garden should be beautiful; that each child should be allowed to choose what he would plant; that he should have a feeling of ownership about his garden bed and the crop he would harvest; that all plants should be placed in the environment best suited to them; and that every part of every bed should be easily accessible to the smallest child.

First, every member of the school wrote a paper indicating in order of preference his choice of vegetables and flowers to be planted in the garden. The accompanying lists include all plants mentioned:

VEGETABLES

Lettuce
Radishes
Onions
Potatoes
Tomatoes
Cabbage
Turnips
Carrots
Spinach
Parsley
Corn
Popcorn
Beans
Peas
Watercress
Celery
Beets
Peanuts
Cotton
Watermelon
Pumpkin
Cucumbers
Muskmelons

FLOWERS

Pansies
Sweet Peas
Cosmos
Asters
Bachelor Buttons
Sweet Alyssum
Violets
Mignonette
Bleeding Heart
Forget-me-nots
Moss Roses
Roses
Geraniums
Sweet Williams
Heliotrope
Hollyhocks
Daisies
Lilies of the Valley
Morning-glory
Nasturtiums
Lady Slipper
Candytuft
Coreopsis
Easter Lilies

To this list were added names which the teachers suggested of plants which would be of service in the science, industrial and art work of the school and which would add new acquaintances to the children's flower friends:

VEGETABLES

Wheat
Sugarbeets
Flax
Kohlrabi
Dill
Sage
Bohnenkraut
Lavender
Kale
Pepper
Plum Tomatoes
Asparagus
Gourds

FLOWERS

Nicotine
Caladium
Four o'clocks
Ageratum
Stock
Wallflower
Salvia
Ornamental Pepper
Marigolds
Amaranthus
Scarlet Runner
Sunflowers
Celosias
Canterbury Bells
Cypress Vine
Zinias

Committees were formed, composed in each case of children who had chosen the same plants. The first two choices of every child were adopted. If, as in several cases, these committees were too small, the third, fourth, or sometimes fifth choice of a child was considered and sometimes volunteers were called for.

After these groups had been formed, a detailed outline of the work necessary to make the garden a success was as follows:

a) Making of the general plan.

b) Drawing of a plan for each teacher, indicating the parts of the garden for which her pupils were responsible.

c) Writing lists of names of children to act on various committees, these lists to be posted in the hallway.

d) Making individual seed envelopes.

e) Labeling same with name of seed, name of child, and grade.

f) Apportioning seed.

g) Writing and attaching to each envelope clear and concise directions for sowing the seed.

h) Surveying the garden.

i) Digging out of the paths (marking beds with string has not been satisfactory).

j) Making garden stakes and labeling same to correspond with envelopes.

k) Making large stakes with small sign boards attached, to aid in readily finding the beds.

l) Placing of stakes in garden.

m) Making of a hotbed.

This list was presented to the school and the various kinds of work were either chosen by or assigned to the grades where they were best adapted. For instance, the plans were drawn by the seventh grade, envelopes made by the third grade, and directions for planting formulated by the fifth grade.

The making of the plan was the most responsible piece of work. It required consideration of many phases, most important among which were beauty, proper shapes of beds for convenience in planting, relative sizes of beds and their positions as to best conditions of light and moisture, and numbers of children acting on the various committees. For example, the favorite vegetable was lettuce. The amount of lettuce seed likely to be used was calculated, and this, with the size of the committee, was considered in determining the dimensions of the lettuce bed. In some cases an entire bed was assigned to one class, for the special study of some crop necessary to the work in that particular grade. For instance, the sixth grade took charge of sugar beets, the fourth grade of flax, the fifth grade of wheat, and the first grade of popcorn.

The work mentioned under *b* was important. The illustration given below shows how from these plans every teacher knew what was to be planted in every nook, and by the colored spots knew at a glance where she might expect to see some of her pupils working. The names of the children did not appear on the plans, because the teacher in charge had a plan which included the names, and directed the placing, of the individual stakes. The beds were marked off by means of a board, the edge of which was pressed into the ground. The depression made was filled with sand, which stayed in place long enough to serve the purpose.

The flower garden was more difficult to plant, because the rows overlapped, and the general arrangement was more complicated. Here the beginning and end of every row was indicated by a stake, the two stakes being labeled alike and facing one another.

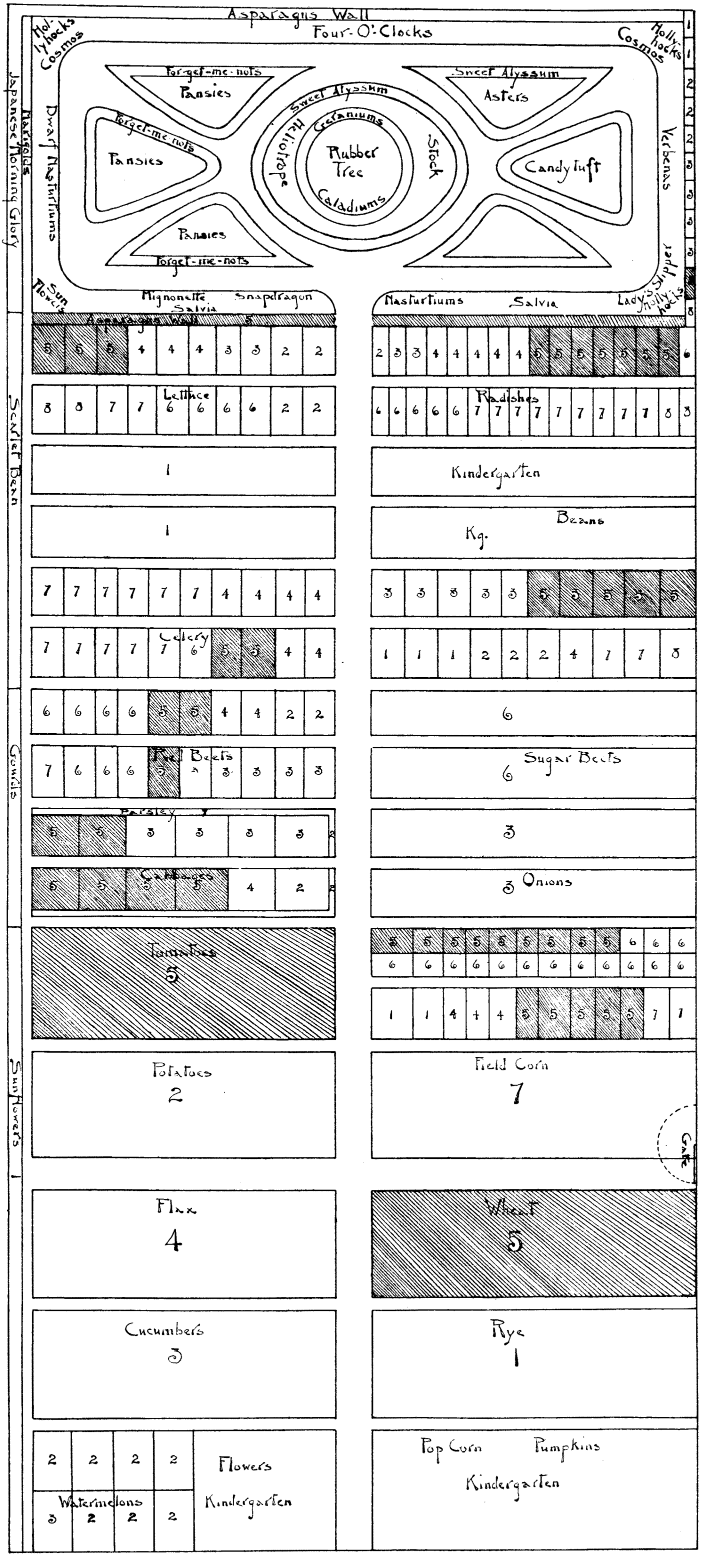
With this plan every child had all the information necessary to make him independent in locating his bed and doing his work. All stakes were marked with paint or ink to make them proof against the rain. A red chalk mark was the means by which the children indicated that a bed had been planted.

Formulating directions for planting was an interesting piece of work. The motive of making all the directions so simple and clear that they might be read and understood by a child in the first grade made a demand for good concise English which the fifth-grade child could thoroughly appreciate. Directions poorly stated might mean failure, disappointment, and a mar to beauty.

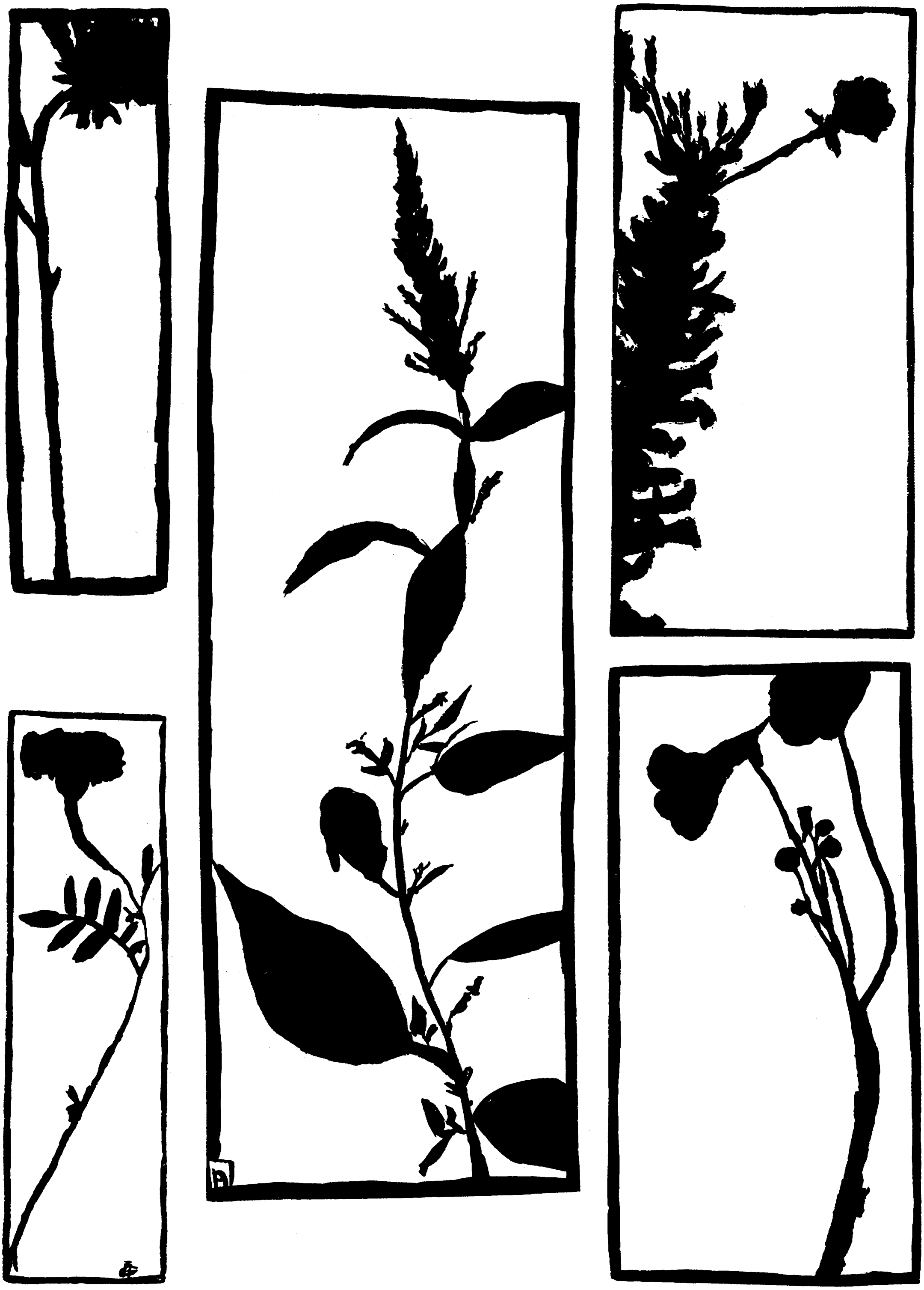
The interest shown in making the hotbed is worthy of mention. The science work on decomposition, generation of heat, plant food, and germination was done with zest. The hotbed was so generous in its productiveness that there was a good supply of plants to give to all children who wished to start home gardens. Many children made small gardens along the edges outside of the big garden. All summer good reports came of tomato and cabbage crops, fine specimens of flowers, etc.

After the planting was accomplished a careful record was kept in writing and painting of the date of planting and the date of germination and appearance of plants in the first stages of growth, and the changes from week to week. This record was made in order to enable us another year to distinguish the young plants from the young weeds. Many mistakes in weeding were made this year. In some cases the children were temporarily discouraged because they expected the plants to appear too soon. One little girl who planted ageratum waited five weeks to see signs of growth. Just as school closed she found a few minute leaves. Four weeks later the plants were one foot high. This fall she supplied every classroom with blossoms for several weeks. Another year the data recorded will prevent this discouragement.

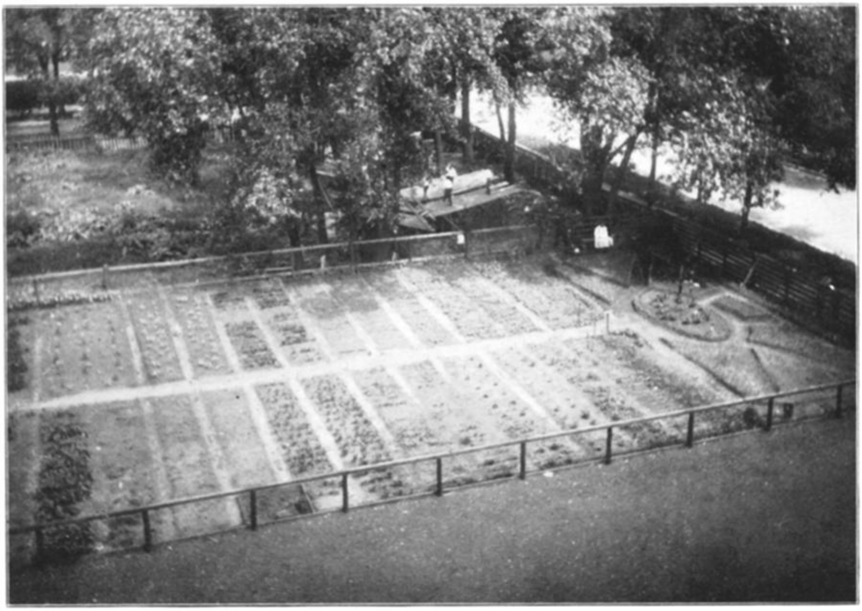
The school garden was a great benefit to the work in the art department, as it furnished abundant material and afforded the opportunity for continual use of flowers and vegetables in the study of elementary composition. The following are a few illustrations selected from the work of the sixth and seventh grades, as their work was done in black and white, and therefore is more easily reproduced than the color work of the other grades. The problem thus illustrated was to consider spaces in the background, masses of flowers and leaves, angles of stems, and their relations to each other.



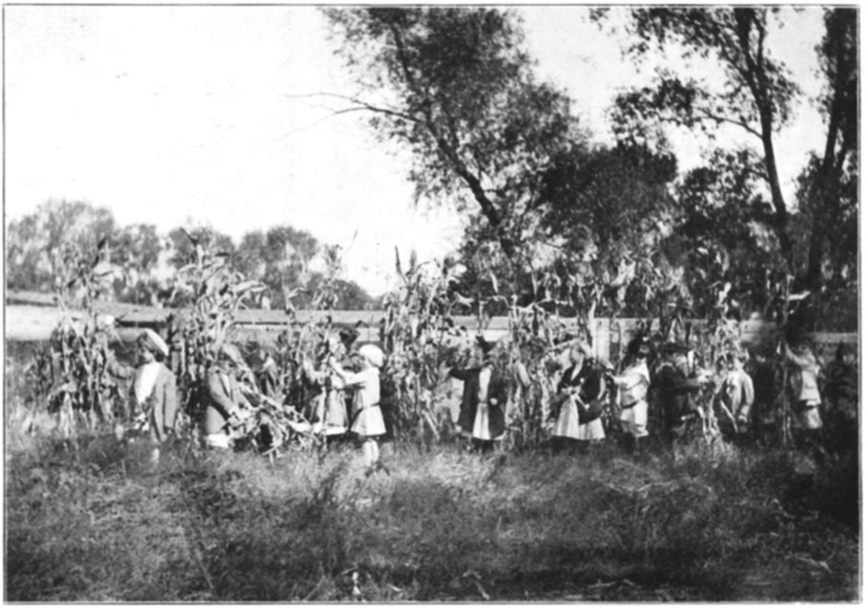
PLAN OF THE GARDEN



GARDEN FLOWERS USED IN ART WORK, SIXTH AND SEVENTH GRADES



BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF GARDEN



FIRST GRADE HARVESTING THE POPCORN

THE SCHOOL GARDEN IN OCTOBER

Some of the sources of special pleasure to the children were: the asparagus hedge planted to separate the vegetable garden from the flower garden, this hedge having been planted in May and started from three-year-old roots; the bright red and yellow celosias, some of which grew four feet tall and waved plume-like on either edge of the long center path of the vegetable garden; the muskmelons, which grew so thick and luscious that from a bed of twenty-four by nine feet were harvested over forty melons; the watermelons, pumpkins, gourds, and green peppers; the celery bed, which supplied the school for seven weeks; the caladiums, which grew from bulbs two inches in diameter to plants five feet tall, with leaves two and one-half feet long. Last, but not least, the garden gate, and the benches which the small boys made from an old tree trunk which they chopped down, should surely be mentioned, for they would appear in any child's list of the special attractions of the garden.

One grade took complete charge of the grounds in front of the building. There they planted all favorite flowers, making every effort to have a variety great enough to insure blossoming plants throughout the seasons. Some children made frequent visits to the garden during the summer. They weeded and watered at those times, but coming irregularly could not give the garden proper care. The watering and weeding during the vacation time was kindly done by the man left in charge of the building, and by other interested people. Some children expressed a commercial instinct by selling vegetables to their parents and to other children. They agreed to put the income into a common bank, the money to be used in buying some of the seeds for next year's garden. The treasury was also increased by funds coming from a neighboring grocer, who bought at regular market prices what produce was not given away.

In August Canterbury bells, Sweet William, and hollyhocks were planted. The young plants have a good start, and there are enough hollyhocks to plant along the entire front of the building.

This fall the flower garden was cleaned and spaded. A large number of bulbs were planted and by this means the children may enjoy the garden for many weeks before June, while other years they have had few blossoms before the close of school. At present many children are nursing geranium cuttings and old stocks planted in window boxes. The pepper plants are adorning several classrooms. All are waiting for the spring when we shall make a much larger hotbed and supply the home gardens and perhaps some children in other schools.

Aside from the definite knowledge gained and its all-around educative value, if the work in our school garden adds a few names to the list of those who will always love and make gardens, it would seem that it has been well worth the time and labor expended upon it.